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ABSTRACT

Serving about 1,300 youths and including three time options and approximately 40 programs, school-age child care works in Fairfax County, Virginia. A contract between the county government and the school board clearly states each party's roles and responsibilities. The county assumes responsibility for all administrative and staffing functions, while the schools provide space and furnishings. Reasons for the success of the program also include (1) harmony between the county government and the school board; (2) parent participation; (3) provision of varied activities for children; (4) achievement of maximum benefits at minimum costs; (5) reduction of potential vandalism and related problems; (6) reduction of child neglect; (7) provision of resources for handicapped youth; and (8) popularity of the program with prospective employers, employees, and home buyers. In short, the program contributes significantly to the quality of life in Fairfax County. Demographic trends indicate that the county has a large number of single-parent families and will continue to exceed neighboring jurisdictions in the number of families with two or more members in the work force. As Fairfax County grows as an employment center, the need for child care programs will continue to grow. (RH)

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OPENING ADDRESS
BY
J. HAMILTON LAMBERT
FAIRFAX COUNTY EXECUTIVE

TO

FAIRFAX COUNTY OFFICE FOR CHILDREN CONFERENCE

SCHOOL-AGE CHILD CARE: IT WORKS!

Thursday, April 12, 1984
9:15 A.M.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
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PS 014498

Thank you for inviting me to open your conference today. My presence here as an expert on child care issues reminds me very much of a snippet of dialogue written by Finley Peter Dunne, the humorist and journalist who created the oft-quoted "Mr. Dooley." The dialogue goes as follows:

> "Ye know a lot aboaut raising children," said Mr. Hennessey.
>
> "I do," said Mr. Dooley. "Not being an author, I'm a gr-reat critic."

Expressed more seriously, what I mean is that recognizing and addressing the problems of children is not just within the province of parents, teachers, child care professionals. All of us share the obligation to attend to matters affecting the well-being of our children.

Fairfax County recognizes this obligation. The Governing Body, by word and action, has expressed a most emphatic commitment to meeting the County's obligation. In my view it is the depth of this commitment which is the primary reason your conference can accurately say that school-age child care works in Fairfax County. Without such commitment an effective program would be impossible.

There are other factors at work here which ensure that this program works. Before I cite a few of these for you I would like to describe briefly the school-age child care program--its history and evolution in Fairfax County.

The concept for the program was developed by the County's school system about ten years ago. However, it did not emerge as a comprehensive, effective Countywide effort until about five years ago when the County Government and the School Board negotiated a contract to accomplish a partnership between the two parties. The contract clearly states each party's roles and responsibilities.

According to this agreement, the County assumes responsibility for all administrative and staffing functions of the program. The Schools are committed to providing space and furnishings in selected elementary schools. The partnership has been successful, as the parties have continued to work in closest harmony. As a result, the program has grown from eight pilot projects to forty programs, with five more budgeted to start up after July first.

The school-age program includes three time options: before school, beginning at 7:15 a.m.; after kindergarten; after school up to 6:15 p.m. A particular child can attend one, two or all three sessions. The average group has thirty children and two staff although there are one or two programs with sixty children and four staff. About thirteen hundred youngsters take part in the program.

With that very brief bit of background I can proceed to explain, with more meaning, why this particular program does indeed work.

- It works because there is an exceptional degree of harmony between the County Government and the School Board. As a result of this partnership, clearly spelled out in the agreement, the program moves forward effectively.

- But this particular child care program really is a three-way partnership. Parents, the third partner, play a critical role: they express the needs for this service, they advise and consent as elements of the program are added or modified and, in the end, it is their satisfaction which encourages the schools and the child care professionals to offer this and similar services.

- In listing the reasons why this child care service works, one must consider the substance of the program. Children are provided the opportunity to participate in a variety of activities--sports, games, arts and crafts, dramatic play, construction, science and nature projects, special events and occasional field trips. These activities take place in a safe and healthy environment under caring supervision and under the guidance of professional day care teachers. Children are served in a time period of their days which, unfortunately, for many youngsters here and elsewhere, often has been a lonely wasteland. Out of that loneliness has grown the tragedy of the "latch key" children, returning from school to an empty home and to a period of unsupervised activity. The school-age child care program offers a productive, fun-filled alternative to the "latch-key" phenomenon.

In my capacity as Fairfax County Executive, I have some of my own reasons for wishing this program and similar activities success. As one who is responsible for administering <u>all</u> County Government programs, including fiscal management, I have my own views on why this program works.

- The school-age child care program works for me because it is the perfect example of a program which provides maximum benefits at minimum costs. It utilizes existing facilities. Its sliding fee scale, whereby lowest income participants are partially subsidized, is based on ability to pay. As a result, the program works for all income groups. And, because it is a fee service, it imposes no excessive financial burden on the County's coffers.

- Another area of my responsibility in the County is made easier because this program works--the criminal justice area. At least thirteen hundred youngsters are not adding a burden to police and juvenile justice systems which are set in motion as a result of vandalism and similar activities. The County's libraries are pleased with this program; "latch key" youngsters often hang out at the libraries. Similarly, school principals praise the program as it reduces the incidence of vandalism, disruption and hanging around on school premises.

- The Department of Social Services benefits because this program works. There is less child neglect. The Mental Health and Mental Retardation planners are equally pleased with the school-age child care program's resources for handicapped youngsters.

- Obviously the economic development and real estate sectors of the County benefit--it is a program that is popular with prospective employers, employees and homebuyers in the area.

- In short, the program works, providing a significant contribution to the quality of life in Fairfax County. It provides a critical support for family life and makes possible the financial viability of many families where a single wage-earner is not adequate to meet the needs of today's economy. It is a program, as I have tried to indicate, which exerts a pervasive influence in our community.

How do I know the school-age child care program works? Because I get telephone calls applauding the service, requests to expand it and other favorable citizen responses. And I get letters, as do the individual members of the Board of Supervisors and the professionals in the Office for Children.

There are many ways to solve the school-age child care problem. This is the way the Fairfax County Government has chosen to deal with the problem. It is important to note that this is not the only such effort in our community. Private providers, community groups and home care also are at work on the problem. There is a good mix of programs here. Different communities can initiate different programs. The important thing is that the programs be made to work to serve the need.

And what does the future hold for this and similar programs? Census trend analysis tells the Fairfax County Government two important things: one, in the Metropolitan Washington Area, Fairfax County now exceeds its neighbor jurisdictions in the number of families with two or more members in the work force; and two, as a trend, this is going to continue through the coming decade.

Based on this trend analysis, it is assumed that the labor force participation rate for women will continue to grow. It is forecast that by 1990, two of every three American mothers will be employed. The obvious consequence of this trend is the continuing, growing need for child care programs. Another stacistic in Fairfax County which exerts significant effect on planning for child care needs is the dramatic increase--one hundred forty percent--during the past decade in the number of single-parent families. The preponderance of the single parents are women with a need to be at work.

Fairfax County, which usually is ahead of most of the nation in many respects, already has nearly two-thirds of all families in that group which includes working mothers. According to the 1980 census, approximately one hundred forty thousand County women are in the labor force; of that number more than fifty-four thousand women have children under the age of seventeen.

We can anticipate that, as employment opportunities and salaries for women become more and more attractive, and as Fairfax County itself grows as an employment center, the trend will continue and perhaps accelerate. As a result, we must continue and intensify our efforts to satisfy the child care needs.

In addition to all the reasons for this program which I have cited, I must add that it simply makes good sense and is a rational enterprise. Where better can a Government and its citizens invest resources to reap such a gratifying and fulfilling return? Nurturing and developing our young people is a lot like building a trust fund for the future. The participants in this child care project are fortunate--their horizons are broadened, their playmates are a reliable and consistent group, their supervisors are loving and patient. None of us has the ability to look at yesterday's group of youngsters or today's group in this program and quantify the results or benefits. And yet, intuitively we know they are better for the experience. Their families and their communities have been spared some stresses.

As our most precious resource, children deserve the best which can be provided for them. I think Fairfax County does its utmost to serve these youngsters. Our Governing Body and our school and County staffs have every intention of ensuring that this and other programs are developed and implemented to meet the needs of this particular group of young citizens.

At the start, I said that the primary reason Fairfax County's school-age child care program works is because of a commitment by the Governing Body and by the government itself to making it work.

It is true--one needn't be a parent or a child care professional to recognize this program need. One need only believe that a community's children are its most precious resource. A community will profit little by attending only to sewers and roads and the like without considering the development of those who will become tomorrow's leaders, workers, planners and dreamers. Fairfax County's School Age Child Care program is one aspect of molding tomorrow's citizens. It works; but we will only know how well it works in the years to come.

I wish you a successful conference.

Thank you.